



ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

JOHN P. HEWKO
General Secretary

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28 June 2013

Fabrizio Burroni
President, Rotary Club of Woodbridge (Ontario), Canada
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Dear Club President Burroni,

Thank you for your club's petition, requesting that the RI Board take a firm position on compulsory full membership for women in Rotary worldwide and on providing equal opportunity for women who aspire to be RI president. The Board considered this matter at its June 2013 meeting.

I am happy to inform you that some Rotary club data cited in your petition is already out of date. Gender balance in Rotary clubs is, in fact, steadily increasing. Our latest report shows 83 percent of clubs are dual gender. In 2013–14 Director Anne Matthews will serve as RI vice president and there will be three additional women directors (Ann-Britt Åsebol, Mary Beth Growney Selene, and Celia Giay). You may also be interested to know that the online tool Rotary Club Central now includes reporting on gender that is visible to all club members, assistant governors, governors, regional coordinators, and RI directors.

As for compulsory membership for women worldwide, the Board noted that RI policies state unequivocally that clubs cannot discriminate against candidates for membership based on gender. Rotary has a strong legacy that clubs should be allowed full autonomy in their membership selection as long as it does not conflict with RI's anti-discriminatory policy. The Board agreed that local leadership needs to recognize and recruit individuals who are interested in serving in RI and to encourage that they be nominated for governor. It is each club's and district's responsibility to identify and select the best leaders.

The Board did not agree that the practice of requiring a club president to serve a full year as president before nomination to governor is discriminatory against women. There are legitimate and practical reasons to require someone to serve as a club president before serving as a governor. Also, qualifications for governor can be specifically excused by the RI Board. Each year, up to 15 Rotarians are excused from one or more portions of governor qualifications based on requests from district leadership for legitimate reasons. Younger and female members are not automatically excluded from serving as governor. Exceptions can and do exist.



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The qualification of having a past governor wait three years before being selected for nomination as RI director was put in place by the 2010 Council. The Board did not support this legislation. It can only be removed or changed by the Council. The Board has no position on the qualifications for who can serve on the Nominating Committee for President; again it is left to the Council.

The Board agreed RI cannot mandate how districts select their leaders. The general secretary is aware of many instances where a candidate does not have to serve for three years as an assistant governor before being considered as a qualifying candidate. Surveys from worldwide membership associations show that people do not want to be elected into leadership positions within an association based on belonging to a certain gender, age group, ethnicity, etc. but they wish to be elected because of their unique skills. The Board agreed that to impose a quota or forced vote between candidates based on their gender qualifications may lead to unintended consequences. Recent research into affirmative action efforts demonstrates that these programs—while put in with the best of intentions—do not work well as they can encourage divisions along lines drawn by discriminatory rules.

As for the report's recommended actions regarding legislation, the RI Board noted that clubs and districts are best positioned to recommend legislation to the 2016 Council regarding changes they feel would be beneficial to the RI.

With regard to the petition's recommended actions, the Board agreed not to take any action on these items and further noted that any issues of discrimination within club practices should be handled by the district directly. Matters that are not resolved can be escalated to the Board for review and action. Noting that the gender composition of clubs continues to increase each year, the Board did not agree to update its strategic plan to eliminate single gender clubs by 2020. With available online zone and district membership reports now including data on age and gender, further action can be taken by clubs to address any imbalances.

Thank you again for your club's petition. I hope you find this feedback useful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



John Hewko
General Secretary, RI

Cc: Ashutosh R. Jhala, President, Rotary Club of Baroda Jawaharnagar
Tobias Mattson, President Rotary Club of Wisborg